

# Using Composted Livestock Manure

With one of the highest populations of horses in Washington, King County produces approximately 290,000 tons of horse manure and bedding material each year. That's about 800 tons per day. For livestock owners, manure management can be a challenge. Ever-growing manure piles can create nutrient pollution in surface and groundwater, can contribute to mud on the farm, and can lead to unpleasant fly and odor problems. Gardeners, landscapers, homeowners, and groundskeepers, on the other hand, often purchase



compost, mulch, and fertilizer to improve the growth, health and appearance of their plantings. WSU King County Extension, in partnership with King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, sought to bring these two groups together to demonstrate and encourage collaboration. When livestock manure is properly composted it is no longer a liability, but becomes a valuable soil amendment, lawn top-dressing, weed reducing mulch, and slowly released source of nutrients. The horse owner's waste is the gardener's gold!

## Program Goals:

- Promote the value of composted livestock manure as a slow-release source of nutrients, mulch, and soil amendment.
- Encourage community and neighbor partnerships to fully utilize composted manure.
- Foster a stewardship ethic among livestock owners by raising awareness of environmental impacts of unmanaged manure and offering alternative practices.
- Encourage and educate livestock owners to properly compost their manure onsite.

In 2005, the WSU King County Extension Livestock Program conducted a series of four workshops and outreach events for livestock owners and other compost product users on environmentally sound livestock manure management practices and compost uses. The workshops and events provided 1) detailed information about the benefits of composting and uses for finished compost, 2) hands-on demonstrations of composting techniques by regional experts, 3) tips and techniques for applying compost in the garden and on the landscape, and 4) a venue for collaboration between those with excess manure and those who desire a source of composted manure.



Local gardening expert Marianne Binetti demonstrates top-dressing beds with compost. *Photo G Cook*



WSU Soil Scientist and "compost guru" Andy Bary demonstrates using compost in the garden at Kelsey Creek Farm. *Photo G Cook*

## Success!

- Workshops were endorsed on air by radio personality and organic gardener Carl Elliott on the June 22, 2005 segment of "Weekday", broadcast by 94.9 fm KUOW
- Over 200 landowners, farmers, and gardeners participated in workshops and events
- Events reached residents in many King County communities including Auburn, Bellevue, Enumclaw, Fall City, Kirkland, Lake City, Maple Valley, Mercer Island, North Bend, Redmond, Renton, Seattle, and Woodinville.

## Livestock manure: turning a waste product into a valuable resource!

The four events were somewhat different from one another due to varied audiences and venues, but they each provided hands-on demonstrations, bulletins and fact sheets about compost and compost use, and a “Manure Share” list produced by King Conservation District designed to connect compost producers with compost users.

**Enumclaw (over 75 participants):** The first workshop was March 19, 2005 at the King County Fairgrounds in association with the Small Farm Expo. The workshop included 1) a PowerPoint presentation on compost and compost utilization by Andy Bary, WSU Soil Scientist, 2) a manure compost bin display featuring a series of aged manures, 3) a chicken tractor display - a portable open bottom cage with chickens scratching in manure, and 4) a livestock bedding materials display with signage describing benefits and drawbacks of each.

**Bellevue (22 participants):** The second workshop was June 28, 2005 at Kelsey Creek Farm and was aimed at both livestock owners and home gardeners. The workshop began with a classroom-style presentation by Andy Bary followed by a hands-on application demonstration. Participants learned to use compost as a top dressing for lawns and established plantings, and how to incorporate compost in new vegetable and flower gardens. The composting area was the final stop where participants saw several stages of manure decomposition.

**Woodinville, Renton, & Auburn (over 100 participants):** The third event was a composted manure showcase at three farms (Red Barns Farm & Country Inn, Three Boys' Alpacas, and Alpacas of Fair Meadows) during the Harvest Celebration Farm Tour on October 1, 2005. The audience for the tour was urban and suburban residents. Each location had a display of composted manure, compost bins, and educational literature. At each farm, an Extension Livestock Advisor was on hand to answer questions throughout the day.

**Redmond (20 participants):** The final workshop was October 29, 2005 at the Clise Mansion at Marymoor Park. This event was advertised to gardeners, landscapers, and pasture owners as a “winterizing with compost” workshop. WSU's Andy Bary gave his composting presentation for the first half of the morning. Local gardening expert Marianne Binetti then took participants outside to demonstrate compost utilization techniques in landscape beds and as a lawn top dressing to prepare the yard for winter.

Workshops and events were publicized widely, with targeted advertising aimed at rural livestock owners, landscape professionals, crop farmers, urban and suburban gardeners, and groundskeepers. All events were very well received. Written evaluations from attendees included the following comments:



The T-shirt says it all!

Photo T White

“Good talk! Good info for beginner AND intermediate composters.”

“I will compost in my garden and apply as mulch on top to suppress weeds.”

“I enjoyed learning about alternatives and things that are cheap and a good source of plant food and amendments.”

“Speakers with great depth of knowledge and ability to speak to common audience.”

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Sylvia Kantor, M.S.  
Extension Educator  
(206) 205-3131; [sylvia.kantor@metrokc.gov](mailto:sylvia.kantor@metrokc.gov)



Tara Zimmerman, M.S.  
Extension Educator  
(206) 205-3203; [tara.zimmerman@metrokc.gov](mailto:tara.zimmerman@metrokc.gov)